

Bard

Bard College
Bard Digital Commons

Robert Kelly Manuscripts

Robert Kelly Archive

5-2005

mayA2005

Robert Kelly
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "mayA2005" (2005). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 788.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/788

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the Robert Kelly Archive at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Robert Kelly Manuscripts by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Bard

ROBERT PENN WARREN PUZZLES OVER A VARIANT IN A STANZA OF COLERIDGE'S "RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

Why does *lonely* become *lonesome*?

I am lonely, you are lonesome?

Lonely means to stand alone

when someone else is wanted,

needed, absent. Desired even.

This poem does not speak of desire.

Lonesome is just a place, a place

can be lonesome without me.

O love. I love you for your

etymologies. Lonely means

lone-bodied. The other

—any other?— is *lone-full*,

full of being alone. The mariner

so full of anguish on the lone sea

refers his terror to the crowded land,

and he finds an absence there,

a complex literary metaphor,
a road that breaks my heart.
Why, why won't it leave me alone,
alone as his road. A road, a road
goes on the land from place to place,

an empty place, or road, or house, is
lonesome (1834) where once, one,
only, you alone, the text, the woman
was *lonely* (1798). The road
was lonely, the man was in his body
all alone. This place is full of alone—

I turn around and look back
over my shoulder —why?— to see
what my body has left behind
after I have passed through the world.
To see if I am alone with my body
on this road. What does a body
do on a road that needs alone?

What does a man do with his body
when alone? He looks behind furtively
and sees he is not alone. A man
is a woman on this road, a woman
is a lonely place, a lonesome man
keeps walking towards her, walking
away from what he knows. At evening
moving west his shadow would be behind him

clear. He is followed by what he chooses,
a man's act is always waiting behind him,
step by step, advancing till the man and his deed
come together. The shadow becomes the man.
But all his life Coleridge fled from his deed,
from all the busy doing that sucks the mind
from kindlier shadow, the silence place,
and leaves him alone with what he must do.

Nothing. What road is this? Alone with his body
already is a crowded place – man, deed, shadow,
road, all jostling to be alone. Alone with him.
He yearns all his life for a lonesome place,

a house with nobody in it. My body is a house
with nobody in it, not even me.

Because I am lonely on a road? No, the road
is always talking, loud and soft the way they do,
all day long the crows or cars or phones are calling.
Phone is a Greek word for voice but phones have
no voices, only crackling sounds that make like words
and frighten me, scare me the way a noise
behind me makes me spin around and look.

And nothing's there. Nothing's ever there.
At noon the church bells have a fit
and make the merchants hungry, hurry
to their silly lunches and a maiden's eye
wary as she takes their orders and I outside
stare past the roast beef to their sprightly unions,
communions, I stand outside, sick
with poetry, tricking myself to feel,
to feel that every rhyme is coming home.

What does a dead man have to do with the living?

What can we learn from dead Coleridge
that the girl across the street could never tell us?
He makes them all come back to life,
Arise, arise his shadow says, *I spill these words*
along the pavement so that you follow, follow.
It must be you I see when I spin round
to check the empty road behind every word,
the eager terrifying hungry shape
that flees from wherever we have been together,

flees towards us trying to *mean*. Words
try to hide themselves in thee. In me.
Embedded in our distances, we flee
into each other, there, ahead
of any place we've ever been, free
of any scent or flavor, the pure alert
apartness of the future, the only place
still free of me, still room for me
to find a lonesome house to store my mind.

We read what no one wrote.
We wrap ourselves with wind

and claim to be trees, gaze
at the interminable sea
and think we have something to say,
even about it, the sea, naming,
naming, speaking birds out of high heaven
to ride the masts of our imagined ships.
No ship, no road, no man, no fiend
behind him hurrying. Just one word now,
another word thirty years later,
and more years go by we try to read.

So little happens in a life but living.
It is terrible to be drunk and read a book,
we try to read everything as if it were a book,
what else can we do, only read, only mark
down words on pages that make us feel
that now I'm reading, this writing business,
just to pretend there's a text I'm reading,
terrible to be drunk and reading, never
knowing where the words are taking,
my own breath so loud I can't smell the words.
They have their own mouths too, *phonaí*
the Greeks said, voices. I have no voice
and if I had I would not listen,

Like one who on a sunlit lawn
Sits trembling in his chair
And having once begun to think
Stops short and thinks no more
Because he knows some frightful thought
Commands him to despair,

no, I don't want to think about it.
Anything. I want to sit here on the lawn
and drink. Forget his strange moon horns,
his broken bird, I have icebergs of my own,
this lawn, *this body round my thought* –

did I say that? A line I have to use.
Write. But never think. Sit here in the sun
like a man who sits quietly and drinks.
But drinking is a kind of thinking,
lonesome thinking that bursts into song,
raucous, a drunk is always young, adolescent
baritone, Coleridge springing up the Devon path

singing. Not for me to sing. A little Mahler
on the phonograph – Jesus, the word means

writing the voice! – then a little Patti Paige
until one is drunk enough for no more drinking,
rhyming poets are always heavy drinkers,
why is that, no more rhyming, hence no more thinking.
This dead albatross between my legs,
this Freudian universe I see in every mirror,
no different from the lonely road
that stretches out before me when I close my eyes.

30 April – 1 May 2005

AND IT WAS HOLDING MEN CLOSE

Letter from the Pope to all sentient beings
when you forget these particular words
the whole thing is gone and you've betrayed
the intricate contract I've made for you
with the stars and the fars. The words are these:
every word shows the way everything that lives
is on the way interfere with no one's way
keep listening and say what comes to mind
harmless dwelling in a hurry world. Darling.
Stop time with a simple breath and keep your word.
Everything that lives is talking. Listen.
As the hand listens to the heart, listen
to every living thing as if hearing your own thought.
There is no other thinking but who they are.
Pray with every body. Every day a new sacrament.
By Sutro Bath House the sea falls away from the rock.

1 May 2005

=====

So beautiful this pen's blue ink.
I mean your eyes. Silver-shadowed
you write on my breath with your smile.
This look carves in. The yearning time
of time, as when spring is new.
An antic spotted leopard with a look
like you. The gender's wrong
but then it always is. We are trees
I think, nice people made of wood
when you look at me that way
all rum and jungle and a smell of fire.

1 May 2005

=====

Vulcan had the right idea,
kept working while the lovers
wove each other in the net
of lust's intense attentiveness.

I was Mars in this scene,
was all over her and she all over me
naked, allusive, unruly
while V just read his book –

he seemed to be a cripple,
kept to his bed, awkward
in it like an athlete fallen
damaged on the field of play –

his own house as it happened.

Or was it hers?

I was the stranger here, allured
by her, appalled at how not clean

her scattered clothes and furniture,
a house full of sticks, a house

made mostly of lust and light.

He didn't even watch us play.

But now I know when I woke up
she was still with him in that space,
dreamers come and go, make love
but leave nothing behind, no dream child,

no story even, just the damp shadow
of our desire on her pale skin,
pale clothes, pale wooden poles
held the pale canopy above her bed.

2 May 2005

THE PRESENCE

yes he did harrow hell it was there to be harried
and he did come back worn out from his travail
most of his flesh given away in the dark what he was
now mostly was light with just enough bone and skin
to hold his eyes firmly fixed on his friends who saw
almost nothing and barely knew him and went along
on their way a way he accommodated himself to go
with them always with them never leave them alone.

3 May 2005

CASTAWAY IDENTITIES

waiting by my boat.

I have to help them one by one
into this bleak fiberglass hull,
old men with wrinkled Goodwill jackets
still smelling of the hospital,
girls in skirts they never would have put on
if they knew that history would make them go boating.
But we never know.
It comes upon us to be gone.

Things work out, the material
is all used up, seagulls
make fun of me, I take revenge
beating them off my jetty with my personal oar
and they float among empty kefir containers
still scoffing. Yogurt. O the
blade of an oar is the sharpest sword,

it cuts us from the world we knew
into the cold slippery fire they call the sea—
and the sea too is the smallest glass,
here, drink it down, the danger,

green in certain lights, the color
of the sky in others, rain or shine,
no waiting, it's always coming at you,
as if Venus lost her bracelet last night,
her copper hoop, and thinks you've got it,

things that are green
are never what they mean.

3 May 2005

ANY INSTRUMENT IS FULL OF WONDER

You have to inject the word
to get it right.

Right into you, deep, and let it heal
or fester. You see the blue line
under the shallow skin.

Then you walk through the passageways
which are in fact the stanzas of your mother's house,
rooms in all the times she lived through
becoming the woman she way,
the woman – somehow – you also are.

All the rooms of you.
To dream is to walk through all the time
that focuses in you. As you.

How selfish it is
to be alive!
To bring all those centuries, crafts, measures, wounds
into this single being you.

3 May 2005

“opera under a pale green sky”

– *Lynn Behrendt*

If you listen hard

you stop hearing.

There are things moving around up there

must be birds. Guess: crows.

No. Smaller. Guess again: pigeons.

Maybe. Silently, no singing.

No tune in her sky.

Pale green like baby linden leaves.

Not absinthe, absinthe turns yellow

when you water it, even the spit

on your lips as you sip.

You can hear it the way you hear

traffic at midnight a quarter-mile away,

an angry beer truck hurrying north.

Why do we go anywhere? So A

can fall in love with B, so C

can send an angry letter and D

meditates revenge. The whole

orchestra is full of tears.

3 May 2005